

Unlike the last time we experienced a hurricane, we weren't running away from it—we were headed toward its aftermath.

HELPING HA AFTER THE STORM



NDS

By Rockwell Palmer

The last time a hurricane made landfall in Florida, USA, I was a little boy. The year was 2005. At the time we lived in Utah and were visiting Florida on a family vacation. My parents say I was not happy to wake up at 3 a.m. to evacuate when the eye of the hurricane was headed directly toward us.

The day after that hurricane passed, we woke up and went outside. My mom said the sky was a beautiful blue and the ocean was calm, but the city looked more like my little sister's bedroom—a disaster zone.

Fast-forward to now. It's the first week of October 2016. My family and



Rockwell Palmer, Author



I have lived in Florida for eight years, and there's a hurricane in the Atlantic Ocean that's destroying everything in its path. It's moving toward us.

Every day we wake up, have family prayer, and then watch the news before we leave for school. My siblings and I all watch to see the

damage the hurricane has caused and to track the path the meteorologists think the storm will take. The only good news about the storm so far is that school is canceled on Friday.

It's 5 a.m. on Sunday morning, and my dad wakes me up and says it's time to go. Just like in 2005, we're up



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF BRAD PALMER AND BY JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES NEWS/GETTY IMAGES AND ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES

early and drive for several hours. I really don't want to be awake this early in the morning, but this time we aren't running away from a hurricane—we're going toward its aftermath.

We're driving a vehicle filled with chainsaws, gas cans, wheelbarrows, ladders, and a bunch of other tools. Hundreds of members of our stake are headed to a chapel in Daytona Beach, an area hit hard by the hurricane, to meet up with nearly 1,500 other Latter-day Saints from other stakes across the state.

The closer we get to Daytona, the lighter it gets outside, and we can actually start to see around us. Everything is a mess. Most of the businesses are closed, even the ones that are usually open 24 hours (yes, even McDonald's!). Very few of the gas stations are open for business, and if

they are, they don't have any gas. Billboards on the side of the road are torn apart. The frames holding highway street signs have been twisted and snapped. Fallen trees and other debris litter the roadways, businesses, and people's homes. The destruction is overwhelming at times.

At the chapel, volunteers from each ward are organized into teams of 10–15. It's Sunday, so inside we can still go in and partake of the sacrament. Outside, we each get a uniform: a Mormon Helping Hands yellow T-shirt. Then each team is given their service assignment.

The two teams from our ward are assigned to go work in Flagler, about 15 miles north. We drive to the courthouse to meet with county officials, who have a long list of homes and businesses that need assistance.

Our team has to navigate roadblocks and downed



power lines on our way to the first home, which the county officials said has a large tree that has fallen in the yard. After we arrive, I jump out of the vehicle and take my saw in hand. I can't believe how big the tree is. But in less than 15 minutes we have completely cut it up and piled the pieces by the road for pickup. One of the most special times of the day is when we have a prayer with the home's family before we move on to the next home.

We travel from home to home and even make a stop at the local First Methodist Church, clearing fallen trees and helping them repair the damage. We finish up just before their Sunday worship service. The reverend comes out to personally thank each one of us, then offers up a beautiful prayer asking the Lord to bless us for our service.

By lunchtime, both teams from our ward have completed all of the assignments we were given. I'm exhausted, but there are still plenty of people in the area we can serve. We take a short break for lunch, and then we begin looking for the next person to help.

We only have to drive past a few homes before we find that person. The rest of the day goes like this: we look for a home in need, we stop, we ask if they need help, we help, we pray with them, and then we look for the next person. Every time we finish helping someone, a member of our group says, "Let's find just one more home."

It's hot outside, and we're dirty, sweaty, hungry, thirsty, tired, and sore. But at some point during the day, I think we all forgot about how hard the work was because we were having so much fun serving. And at the end of the day, we all look around at each other and notice two things in common.

First, our actual "Mormon helping hands" had become filthy from the work we'd accomplished, but we're all proud of it. It's our badge of honor.

The second thing is that we are all smiling. It reminds me that we are all blessed to be a part of this great Church, where we are taught the importance and the benefit of Christlike service.

It was the most exhausting Sunday of my life, but the great thing about this on-the-job Sunday School lesson is that we were living our Christian convictions at the same time we were learning them. **NE**

The author lives in Florida, USA.

